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ABSTRACT

Noting that parents play an essential role in preventing or breaking the cycle of violence, this pamphlet shows parents how to prevent violence in their home and community. The pamphlet, designed for use with children of all ages, is part of the "Bright Futures for Families" series, which offers information on health and child development for use by families and by health care professionals. The pamphlet focuses on strategies and action steps parents can take to help teach their children alternatives to violent behavior. Parents are given suggestions for showing love and concern, developing two-way communication with their children, handling powerful emotions effectively, finding solutions to conflict without fighting, keeping their child from being victimized by a bully, preventing their child from becoming a bully, and being an advocate to reduce school violence. The pamphlet concludes with a list of seven print and videotape resources to help prevent violence. (KB)

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Bright Futures *for Families*

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

PS 029312

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HRSA
Health Resources and Services Administration
Maternal and Child Health Bureau

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WHAT IS BRIGHT FUTURES FOR FAMILIES?

Bright Futures for Families offers a variety of materials on health and childhood development to help families raise healthy children. This booklet shows you how to prevent violence in your home and community. This booklet can be used with children of all ages. It has been designed by parents so that families can have good experiences caring for their children's health and development as equal partners with health care professionals.

In these booklets, you will learn how to find the most appropriate health and development advice for raising your children. These booklets show you ways to become a partner in making the best health care decisions for your child. As you read *Bright Futures for Families* materials, think of how you can use them as you plan your visits and discussions with the many people who care for your children -- at home, in school -- in all the places your children go.

Other materials produced by *Bright Futures* are used by health care professionals as reminders of all the many good and important questions that families have about raising their children. *The Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents,* (M. Green, and J. Palfrey, eds., 2000), provide information for health care professionals and work in conjunction with other *Bright Futures for Families* materials.

Look for other *Bright Futures* materials, such as posters and pamphlets, when you visit your health care professional's office. As doctors, nurses, dentists and others are trained with *Bright Futures* materials, families will find themselves encouraged to be full partners with health care professionals in the ways described in this booklet.

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families can help prevent violence

All parents want their children to grow up healthy and well. Parents from all cultures and backgrounds share the common goal of raising their children in safe and supportive environments, so that these precious individuals can grow up to succeed, to fulfill their potential, and to realize their dreams. However, as we are only too aware, we live in challenging times. Violence of all kinds is at unprecedented levels in our society — in our homes, our schools and in our communities — and deeply embedded in our media and entertainment worlds. How can we change these destructive patterns? Is there a way we can work together to make our homes and communities a safer and healthier place for kids to be kids? The answer to these questions is an overwhelming yes. Working together as partners, parents and health care professionals can, and are making a difference.

As a parent, you play an essential role in preventing and breaking the cycle of violence. Parents are the primary providers for their children, their main source of food, health, and nurturing. Sadly, some parents can also be neglectful and abusive. Families are important; they are the primary social influence on children. How parents behave, how a family functions, has a direct and immediate impact on how children grow up. Our behaviors determine their behaviors. One of the most effective ways to prevent antisocial and criminal behavior is for parents to be actively involved in their children's health and education. Health care professionals play an important role as well. They offer parenting guidance, screening for medical problems, and referrals to other professionals. They also help integrate violence prevention messages into health care check-ups, school registration, summer camp, or sports screening.

strategies and action steps that help your children

Be a positive role model. Everything you do, they see and imitate --
Talk to them, and — most important — listen to what they have to say.
Spend valuable time with them that includes fun activities.
Get to know your children's friends to ensure they are a positive influence.
Find out where they play and/or hang out and make sure it is safe.
Let them know you disapprove of fighting.
Keep your children drug-free.

Most Important: Never act violently toward your children -- or others!

Show love and concern

When you actively build warm family relationships, you naturally protect and guard your children from violence and from many other risky behaviors. Here are some good ways to show love and concern.

- ***Tell your child you love him or her -- everyday!***
- ***Show affection daily with a hug, a kiss, or a touch.***
- ***Make time for play, for your family to have fun, to do positive things together.***
- ***Meet your children's friends to ensure they have positive influences.***
- ***Reward your child for good behavior or a job well done.***
- ***Set clear rules for behavior, monitor your child's behavior, and give him or her feedback.***
- ***Encourage and help your child to set personal and educational goals.***

Communication is a two-way street

Children who have a good relationship with their parents and communicate openly are more likely to turn to them for advice when they face challenging situations than to rely on their peers for guidance. When you talk to your children, remember to:

- *Listen to what your children say – really listen – to their ideas, jokes, concerns, daily trials and tribulations, dreams, crazy notions, and ever evolving points-of-view.*
- *Encourage respect for individual differences. Show them that you value each and every person.*
- *Before you start talking, find out what they know about violence and ways to prevent it.*
- *Help your children understand the consequences of violence. Despite what we see on TV, violence isn't glamorous. Violence leaves emotional as well as physical scars and hurts everyone.*
- *Keep the lines of communication open with your child – even when it's tough and you're upset.*
- *Share your concerns honestly and openly. Show them positive ways to turn around bad behavior.*
- *Let them know that they can talk to you about anything. Always.*

TS CAN DO

dealing with red-hot emotions

As parents, we have an important job to do helping our children understand their feelings. Feeling sad or glad, being scared or mad are powerful emotions we all experience. It's easy for children to become overwhelmed or angry when they get upset or are faced with frightening or scary situations. Children who don't know how to control their anger are more likely to fight. Help them think through and predict the consequences of getting mad. Teach your children how to calm down and talk over their problems.

Tips for handling those powerful emotions

- Everyone gets mad, yells, or is really angry from time to time. But remember, anger isn't permanent. Anger is a powerful emotion, but it doesn't last. No one can stay mad forever.
- Share your pain, fears and confusion. In the midst of a conflict, express these feelings rather than your anger -- and don't start fighting.
- Find ways to break the tension. Change the physical dynamics of the situation. Take a deep breath, count to 10, count to 10 again — this time backwards. Move around, drink a glass of water, or go for a walk. A change of scenery helps to clear the air.
- Once you've calmed down, think about the problem with a clear head. Use your mind, not your muscles. When your brain's in gear, your heart will stop pounding, and your body quit shaking!
- Own up to your part in an argument. Apologize if you hurt someone. Mean what you say.
- Take constructive steps to solve the problem. Be fair. Come to a joint agreement on a solution.
- Follow through on what you agreed to. Keep your promises.

You have the power to keep you child free from violence if you:

spend time
show love
communicate

peaceful solutions - find good answers without fighting

Parents worry when they see their children involved in arguments or fighting with other children. Fights don't solve problems - they only make matters worse. Show your children how they can solve problems and win without fighting. Here are some techniques you can model with your children to "defuse" tension and arguments and build peaceful solutions.

- Talk clearly and calmly. State the problem and your desire to solve it without fighting.
- Use humor to defuse the situation. ***Lighten up.*** Make fun of the problem.
- Compromise. When both parties give up something, both get something in return.
- Give in. Sometimes it's not worth the bother. Let the other person have what he wants.
- If it's not a big deal, don't make it a big deal. Nine times out of ten, it's really small stuff.
- Look for a way out that's a win-win solution. Negotiate a settlement both sides agree on.
- Praise your child when he follows through with a solution and keeps his side of the bargain.

how to keep your child from being victimized by a bully

No one is born a bully; bullying is a learned behavior. Bullying is about control and intimidation. Children who are victimized are often passive and may have low self-esteem, fears, anxiety, or difficulty in establishing stable friendships. In contrast, bullies often seem to have high self-esteem and a whole crowd of friends. Bullies have learned how to control people and get their own way by being aggressive and obnoxious. They act out both verbally and physically with put-downs, name-calling, pushing and shoving, petty theft and assault. Help your child to respond effectively to bullying behavior:

- Help your child develop a sense of his own personal power and self worth.
- Teach him to stand up for his own rights and show that he is not afraid of bullying behavior.
- If your child is harassed, encourage him to ask for help - from you, teachers, and the principal.
- Explore the possibility of making friends with the bully.
- Learn to absorb and walk away from insults and threats.

prevent your child from becoming a bully

- Teach your child to respect himself or herself aand to respect others.
- Seek help from school counselors when your child displays bullying or aggressive behaviors.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child. Sign of serious problems include: frequent angry outbursts, fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use.
- Get help for your child. Talk with a trusted professional in your child's school or in the community.

what you can do about violence in your children's school

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with your child. Show your support for the rules and help your child understand the reasons for them.
- Involve your child in setting rules for appropriate behavior at home.
- Know what's going on. Keep a bulletin board at home. Post key dates, after-school activities and special events. Share the busy family schedule. Set up times for "check-ins" and saying "hi"! and celebrate your children's successes and the successes of others.
- Encourage you child to take part in school activities, e.g., band practice, clubs and team sports.
- Involve your child in other community activities, e.g. church choir, karate lessons, or arts and crafts.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as the school psychologist, principal, or teacher.
- Be involved in your child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with teachers, and attending school functions such as parent conferences and class programs.
- Join the PTA and take part in meetings. Your ideas are welcome and make a difference!
- Get to know school administrative personnel. Work with them to make the school more responsive.
- Share your ideas about how the school can encourage family involvement, welcoming all families and including them in meaningful ways in their children's education.
- Encourage your school to offer before- and after- school programs. Enroll your children.
- Volunteer to work with school-based and community groups concerned with violence prevention. If there isn't an existing group, offer to form one.
- Talk with other parents at your neighborhood schools and share your concerns. Discuss how you can work together as a team to ensure your children's safety and serve as a volunteer for school activities.

Remember: to be a positive parent you don't have to do ALL of these! Doing as many as you can will make a big difference in the life of your child.

for more information on violence prevention

Keeping Your Children Healthy and Safe: Violence Prevention for Families, a videotape for families with practical ideas on how to keep your family safe, National Parent Consortium, 202.463.2299, or e-mail: npcmch@cs.net (English, Spanish and Captioned versions available)

Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias: What Parents Can Do, tips for helping children appreciate diversity and deal with others' biases, National Association for the Education of Young Children, (800) 424-2460 or (202) 232-8777

A Guide for Parents: You Are the Experts on Raising 'Violence-Free' Children, helpful tips for parents, Children's Safety Network (CSN) and Violence Prevention Resource Center (617) 969-7100 x2207; email: csn@edc.org; Web site: http://www.edc.org/HHD/csn

Taking Action to Prevent Adolescent Violence: Educational Resources for Schools and Community Organizations, resource materials for parents and professionals, Children's Safety Network (CSN) and Violence Prevention Resource Center, (617) 969-7100 x2207; email: csn@edc.org; Web site: http://www.edc.org/HHD/csn

Violence in Young Lives: Islands of Safety: Assessing and Treating Young Victims of Violence, designed for the many people who care for and/or come in contact with young children, ZERO TO THREE, (800) 899-4301 or (202) 638-1144; Web site: http://www.zerotothree.org

Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools, a guide to help identify early indicators of troubling and potentially dangerous student behavior, US Department of Education, Office Of Special Education And Rehabilitative Services, 800-USA-LEARN, http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/

Safeguarding Your Children, home, school and community violence prevention issues, National PTA and Allstate Foundation, The National PTA330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL, 60611-3960, or e-mail:info@pta.org, http://pta.org/programs.sfgrdtoc.htm.